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THE

FIRST ARTICLE

England. Divines &c.

OF THE

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WESTMINSTER

CONFESSION

EXAMINED,

And Found not Agreeable, but Contrary to

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

PROVE ALL THINGS: HOLD FAST THAT
WHICH IS GOOD. PAUL,

L O N D O N:

Sold by S. CROWDER, E. and C. DILLY, and
J. KNOX.

M.DCC.LXXII.

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T H E
F I R S T A R T I C L E
O F T H E
WESTMINSTER CONFESSION
E X A M I N E D.

THE first article, or proposition, of the Westminster Confession is this, “Although the
“light of nature, and the works of creation and
“providence, do so far manifest the goodness,
“wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men
“inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give
“that knowledge of God, and of his will, which
“is necessary unto salvation.”

HERE are two propositions. The first proposition is, “The light of nature, and the works
“of creation and providence, do so far manifest
“the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as
“to leave men inexcusable.” The second is,
“The light of nature, and the works of crea-
“tion and providence, are not sufficient to give

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“ that knowledge of God, and of his will, which
“ is necessary unto salvation.”

AGAINST the first of these propositions I have no objection. It seems, if I understand it aright, to be the sentiment of St Paul. And it seems to be expressed more clearly, and with greater precision, by him, when he says, Rom. i. 18. ‘ The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them: for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse, because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.’

BUT how is the second of these propositions to be reconciled with the first? How can the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, leave men inexcusable, and yet not be sufficient to give them that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation? For what are they inexcusable? Are they inexcusable for not having that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation? They are supposed to have no other source from which they can derive that knowledge, but the light of nature, and the works of

creation and providence. These, it is here affirmed, are not sufficient to give that knowledge. Is not this a sufficient excuse, for their want of it, both in the sight of God and man? Is a man who was born blind inexcusable for not seeing? If he is not, how can any man be inexcusable for not knowing what never was in his power to know? Or are they inexcusable for not acting agreeably to the will of God? If they know his will, and yet act not agreeably thereunto; or, if they can know his will, and yet remain ignorant of it, they certainly are without excuse. But how they can be inexcusable, and yet not have it in their power to know his will, is not easy to conceive.

OR shall it be said, that the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, are indeed sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which renders men inexcusable when they act contrary to the will of God; and yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation? Is this the meaning of the Article? Do the Westminster Divines here affirm, that the light which God hath given the heathen nations is, when they abuse it, sufficient to render them inexcusable, and consequently worthy of damnation; and yet that same light, how careful soever they may be to improve it, is not sufficient to guide them unto salvation? Yes, this is their meaning.-----Let them speak for themselves. See their own words, Chap. X.

Sect. 4. "Others not elected, although they may
 " be called by the ministry of the word, and
 " may have some common operations of the
 " Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ,
 " and therefore cannot be saved: MUCH LESS
 " can men, not professing the Christian religion,
 " be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they
 " never so diligent to frame their lives accord-
 " ing to the light of nature, and the law of that
 " religion they do profess; and to assert and
 " maintain that they may, is very pernicious,
 " and to be detested."——See also the Larger
 Catechism, the answer to Question 60. "They
 " who, having never heard the gospel, know
 " not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, can-
 " not be saved, be they never so diligent to
 " frame their lives according to the light of na-
 " ture, or the laws of that religion which they
 " profess; neither is there salvation in any other
 " but in Christ alone, who is the Saviour only
 " of his body the church."

THESE, Reader, these are the words of the
 Westminster Divines. Their meaning is plain.
 All those nations of men, to whom God hath gi-
 ven no other rule of life but the light of nature,
 are truly in a most wretched condition. They
 cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to
 frame their lives according to the light of na-
 ture, which is the only light their Maker hath
 been pleased to give them. How diligent soever
 they may be to improve that light, to frame their
 lives according to it, and to make the best use of

it they can, yet they cannot be saved. To assert and maintain that they may be saved, is very pernicious, and to be detested. Their eternal damnation therefore is absolutely certain, how careful soever they may be to make the best use of the only light which God hath seen fit to give them. If this is the case, surely it had been good for the greatest part of mankind that they had never been made.

I THINK I see the Reader here making a pause, a pause that speaks him a man: his heart melts:—generous drops bedim his eyes:—he pities his brethren, whose hearts, he knows, are formed, like his own, with a natural desire of happiness, and an ardent longing after immortality.—He casts a compassionate eye on an innumerable multitude now upon the face of the earth, who never heard, and never could hear the gospel, in comparison with whom the professors of Christianity are but a few. He looks back through many past ages, and forward through ages to come, on a vastly greater multitude, who have been, and are likely to be in the same condition.

‘ How few, saith he, of mankind, in comparison, have had the opportunity of hearing the
‘ gospel? how vast the multitude of those who never had that opportunity? Are not all they who
‘ have not, as well as those who have heard the gospel, my brethren? Hath not God made of one
‘ blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the

‘face of the earth? Yes, they are all my brethren:
‘I cannot be unconcerned for their welfare: and
‘are they all lost,—lost for ever,—lost, be they
‘never so diligent to frame their lives according
‘to the best light God hath seen fit to give
‘them? Alas, my brethren! Oh that my head
‘were a fountain of waters, that I might weep
‘day and night for their hard——hard fate!——
‘Let me ask again, are they not all the off-
‘spring of God? have we not all one Father?
‘hath not one God created us? and hath the
‘Father of our spirits utterly abandoned so vast
‘a multitude of his rational offspring? hath he
‘doomed them all to everlasting destruction, be
‘they never so careful to frame their lives ac-
‘cording to the best light he hath been pleased to
‘give them? Is it thus the Father of mercies deals
‘with men, whom he made in his own image?
‘is it thus he deals with men, who are, by his
‘own unerring Spirit, stiled the offspring of
‘God? Should any Father on earth deal thus
‘with his own children; I should think he de-
‘served not the name of a Father; nay, I should
‘even venture to pronounce him cruel.——But
‘here——what shall I say? what shall I think?
‘the Father of mercies cannot be cruel: he, with
‘whom there is no respect of persons, cannot be
‘unjust. My heart inclines me to say, and E-
‘lihu, in the book of Job, hath taught me to
‘say, Far be it from God that he should do
‘wickedness, and from the Almighty that he
‘should commit iniquity; for the work of a
‘man shall he render unto him, and cause every

‘ man to find according to his ways; yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.—No man, no assembly of men, shall ever persuade me, that the Judge of all the earth will not do that which is right; or that he, whose tender mercies are over all his works, will ever be cruel to any of his creatures. But how shall I reconcile this doctrine of the Westminster assembly with justice and goodness? Is it absolutely certain, that the light of nature, the only light which God hath given to mankind, a few only excepted, is, when abused, sufficient to render them inexcusable, and worthy of eternal damnation; and yet that same light, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to it, is not sufficient to guide them unto salvation? Is this doctrine absolutely true and certain? and is the denial of it very pernicious, and to be detested? If I may not venture to deny this doctrine, yet I hope I may venture to inquire upon what foundation it stands. Was the Westminster assembly infallible? or is this doctrine as plainly taught in the holy scriptures as it is in their Confession?’

A HUMANE reader, I think, will naturally indulge himself in some such soliloquy as this, upon an attentive inspection of the article now under review. And I hope it will not be thought unreasonable to comply with his desire, and to inquire upon what foundation this doctrine

stands. Was the Westminster assembly infallible? they themselves did not claim infallibility. "All synods and councils, say they, since the apostles times, MAY ERR." It only remains, then, that we inquire whether this doctrine be as plainly taught in the holy scriptures as it is in the Westminster Confession. To this I am persuaded the greatest admirers of that Confession can have no objection. The Westminster Divines themselves invite us to this inquiry. "The supreme Judge, say they, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence, we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture."—To this tribunal let us appeal.

I, FOR my part, do not remember any place of the sacred writings, where it is said, that the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. But some places readily occur, where the contrary doctrine seems to be taught. The Westminster Divines, however, have attempted to prove their doctrine from scripture. This renders it proper that we should consider their proofs, before we proceed to point out those places of scripture which seem to be against them.

THE first of their proofs is, 1 Cor. i. 21.
‘ For after that in the wisdom of God, the world
‘ by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by
‘ the foolishness of preaching, to save them that
‘ believe.’ The meaning of this text may be
thus briefly expressed, ‘ For when, in the midst
‘ of all those displays of divine wisdom with
‘ which men were always surrounded, the world
‘ by all its improvements in wisdom knew not
‘ God; when this was generally the case, it
‘ pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel,
‘ which an ignorant world accounts foolishness,
‘ to save them that believe.’ This text therefore
saith, that at the time when the gospel was pu-
blished, the world, the heathen world in gene-
ral, knew not God; but it doth not say they
could not know him: on the contrary, the A-
postle seems to intimate, that they might have
known God, if they had been willing, because
they were surrounded with visible and illustrious
manifestations of his wisdom in the works of
creation and providence. In the wisdom of God,
saith he, even in the midst of all that divine wis-
dom which shines every where, and which men
may every where see in all the works of God,
the world by its pretended wisdom knew not
God. And when the generality of men, thus
neglecting to attend to the light of nature, were
sunk into gross ignorance, God, instead of pu-
nishing them as they deserved, was graciously
pleased to grant them a new and a greater light,
even the light of his glorious gospel. When the
world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God

by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. The light of nature could not save those men who wickedly despised it, and neglected to attend to it. And the light of the gospel can save only them that believe, not them by whom it is rejected and accounted foolishness. No light whatsoever can save those men who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. And of this sort of men there are many among Christians as well as among Heathens. But that the light of nature cannot save those who carefully attend to it, and diligently frame their lives according to it, this text doth not say. Nor doth it say any thing at all to the purpose for which it is here quoted: nay, it rather seems to insinuate something contrary to the doctrine of which it is here alledged as a proof: for it seems to suppose that mens ignorance of God was owing to their own want of attention, and not to any defect in the light of nature: they might have known God, because his wisdom appears every where in his works.

THE next proof here adduced is, 1 Cor. ii. 13. ‘ Which things also we speak, not in the
‘ words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which
‘ the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual
‘ things with spiritual; ver. 14. But the natural
‘ man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of
‘ God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither
‘ can he know them, because they are spiritually
‘ discerned.’

Now, that St Paul preached the gospel, not in the words which man's wisdom taught him, but which were taught him by the Holy Ghost, and that he compared spiritual things with spiritual, this evidently hath no sort of connexion with the sufficiency or insufficiency of the light of nature. This therefore is not to the purpose.

BUT the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. The things of the Spirit of God here must mean the things revealed by the Spirit of God, the very things which St Paul preached. Those things the natural man receiveth not, for they are foolishness unto him. The natural man therefore here spoken of, is not one under the mere light of nature, but one who hath the light of the gospel offered to him, and rejects it, because he accounts it foolishness. Whatever therefore is here said of this natural man, can have no relation to the sufficiency or insufficiency of nature's light; and, consequently, whatever is here meant by the natural man, no argument can be drawn from this text in favour of the doctrine of which it is alledged as a proof. Not only the light of nature, but even the light of the gospel itself, cannot save this man, so long as he rejects it, and will not receive it. And the text affirms, that so long as he continueth to be a natural man, whatever the meaning of that expression may be, he receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him. Thus, without entering any

farther into the meaning of this text, it is already manifest that it is no way to the purpose.

BUT we may further observe, that the word which our translators have here rendered natural, they have, in two * other places of the New Testament, very justly and properly, rendered *sensual*; and they might with no less propriety have rendered it *sensual* in this place also; and then the meaning of this text would appear to be, ‘But the sensual man, who is
‘wholly governed by his sensual appetites, receive
‘not the truths revealed by the Spirit of
‘God; for these truths, because they are not suitable
‘to his sensual inclinations, appear foolishness
‘to him; and therefore, so long as he continues
‘sensual, he cannot know them with † approbation,
‘because they are spiritually discerned; and he, being
‘entirely governed by sensual appetites, hath no
‘spiritual discernment, or no taste or relish of spiritual things.’

BUT if the reader is not satisfied with this interpretation, let him only attend to this circumstance, that the natural or sensual man, here spoken of, is not one under the mere light of nature, but one who hath the light of the gospel

* James iii. 15. Jude v. 19. † To *know*, frequently signifies in scripture, to approve, to favour, or to be pleased with; Psal. i. 6. The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; Nahum i. 7. The Lord is good—and he knoweth them that trust in him; Matth. vii. 23. I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity. And in many other places.

offered to him, and rejects it; and keeping this circumstance in view, let him try if the Apostle's words can be made to bear any rational meaning that favours this doctrine of the Westminster Divines; let him try this, and he will soon be convinced that it is impossible.

Now these are all the texts which the Westminster Divines have produced, in this place, to prove, that the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. And in all these texts, it is manifest, there is not the least shadow of a proof, or of any thing that favours this doctrine. But they have taught the same doctrine elsewhere, namely, in the Larger Catechism, the Answer to Question 60; and there they have produced some other texts of scripture to prove it. I shall first set down their doctrine in their own words, and then point out their proofs. Their doctrine is this.

“ They who, having never heard the gospel,
“ know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him,
“ cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to
“ frame their lives according to the light of na-
“ ture, or the laws of that religion which they
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“ ture, or the laws of that religion which they
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“ but in Christ alone, who is the Saviour only
“ of his body the church.” Their proofs are
these which follow.

ROM. x. 14. 'How then shall they call on
' him in whom they have not believed? how
' shall they believe in him of whom they have
' not heard? and how shall they hear without a
' preacher?' In this text, it is supposed, that
men cannot believe the gospel, unless it be re-
vealed to them: therefore the light of nature
cannot lead men to the knowledge of the gospel.
This is granted; it needs no proof.

2 THESS. i. 8. 'In flaming fire, taking ven-
' geance on them that know not God, and obey
' not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who
' shall be punished with everlasting destruction
' from the presence of the Lord, and from the
' glory of his power.' This text is a clear proof,
that everlasting perdition awaits all the wicked,
and particularly wicked Christians, who obey
not the gospel. This text affirms, that men who
know not God shall be punished. This supposes,
that they had it in their power to know God; for a
righteous judge cannot punish men for not know-
ing what never was in their power to know. This
seems rather to be against the doctrine of the
Westminster Divines; at least, this is no proof,
that they who never heard the gospel, and there-
fore cannot know Jesus Christ, shall be punished
with everlasting destruction, because they be-
lieve not in him. How can they believe in him
of whom they have not heard? and how can a
righteous judge condemn them to be punished
for not believing in one of whom they never
heard?

EPH. ii. 12. 'That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.' The Christians, to whom the Apostle here writes, had been heathens before their conversion to Christianity. At that time they were without any knowledge of Christ, as all heathens must be; for no man can know any thing of Christ without a divine revelation; and, as they were at that time without any knowledge of Christ, so they were also without hope of ever coming to any knowledge of him, or of ever receiving any benefit from him; for, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, they could have no hope or expectation of a Messiah as the Jews had. But this text hath not said, that such as have it not in their power to know any thing of Christ in this world, shall receive no benefit from him hereafter; nor hath any text in the Bible said any such thing: on the contrary, Christ himself hath informed us, that when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory, all nations shall be gathered before him; and then shall he say unto the righteous of all nations, 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'---Again, the Christians, to whom the Apostle here writes, are said to have been, in their heathen state, without God in the world. If the meaning be, that they were without the knowledge of God, this was not the fault of the light of nature, but their

own fault; for St Paul, speaking of such as have no other guide than the light of nature, saith, Rom. i. 19. 'That which may be known of God
' is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it un-
' to them; for the invisible things of him from
' the creation of the world are clearly seen, being
' understood by the things that are made, even his
' eternal power and Godhead.' If the meaning be, that they worshipped not God, the light of nature, in that case, left them without excuse, 'because when they knew, or might have known
' God, they glorified him not as God, neither
' were thankful.' Or, if the meaning be, that they were at that time without having God to be their God in covenant with them, as he was after they became Christians; yet still there is nothing in this text to the purpose for which it is here quoted by the Westminster Divines.

JOHN i. 10, 11, 12. Read these verses in your Bible, and remember that the Jews, among whom Christ made his appearance in the flesh, were not left to the mere light of nature, but had also the light of a divine revelation, which God had made unto them by Moses and the prophets.

JOHN viii. 24. 'I said therefore unto you,
' that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe
' not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.'
The Jews, to whom Jesus spake these words, were not under the mere light of nature; they had Moses and the prophets, and Jesus Christ

himself preached unto them. This text therefore cannot be to the purpose.

MARK xvi. 16. 'He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.' This text is very unfairly quoted: in the Bible it stands thus: 'And he said unto them, (that is, Jesus said unto his apostles,) Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not, shall be damned.' He who hath the gospel preached to him by an apostle, and believeth not, shall be damned. Will any man in his sober senses infer from this, that all they, who never heard of the gospel at all, shall also be damned for not believing it?

I COR. i. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24. Read this passage in your Bible. The 21st verse has been considered already. Try if you can find in the other verses any proof, that men who never heard the gospel cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature.

JOHN iv. 22. 'Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews.' This text relates to the difference between the Jews and the Samaritans about the place of worship. Whatever therefore be the meaning of this text, there is evidently nothing in it concerning the light of nature; for both

Jews and Samaritans were under the law of Moses, and not under the mere light of nature. Nor is there one word concerning the light of nature in either of those two passages of scripture which follow.

ROM. ix. 31, 32. Phil. iii. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Both which see in your Bible. The first of these passages speaks of the unbelieving Jews, who rejected the gospel, but saith nothing of the light of nature, or of any person under that light. The second passage informs us, that, in St Paul's opinion, believing in Christ, and obeying his gospel, is of more value than the most exact observance of the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses; or rather, that the observance of these ceremonies, now under the gospel, is of no value at all. But here is not the least hint of any thing relating to the light of nature, or to those who have no other guide but that light. It is indeed surprising to see such a collection of scripture proofs, and not one of them to the purpose. But we come at last to a text which hath at least some appearance of being to the point.

ACTS iv. 12. 'Neither is there salvation in
'any other; for there is none other name un-
'der heaven given among men whereby we must
'be saved.' The person of whom it is here said, that there is no salvation in any other, is our Lord Jesus Christ. That the Westminster Divines understood the salvation here spoken of to

be eternal salvation is manifest; for otherwise they could not have thought this text any way to their purpose. And it is undoubtedly true, that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and men, and by him alone men can attain to eternal salvation. But this truth, as some think, should be deduced from other texts, and not from this. However, that I may argue with these Divines upon their own principles, I shall grant, that the salvation here meant is eternal salvation: and this being granted, it follows, that this text is a clear and full proof, that no person, whether he be a Christian, or a Jew, or a Heathen, shall be saved at the last day in any other way than by the mediation of Jesus Christ. Now, if it could be likewise proved, that no person who never heard the gospel shall be saved by Jesus Christ, then the argument would be complete. But this last point has not yet been proved. Here therefore the argument fails. The last proof here adduced is,

EPH. v. 23. 'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Saviour of the body.' This text is adduced to prove, that Christ is the Saviour *only* of his body, the church. St Paul saith Christ is the Saviour of the body, by which he means the church. But neither St Paul, nor any other sacred writer, hath ever said, that Christ is the Saviour *only* of the church. The word *only* is put in by the Westminster Divines them-

selves, without any colour of authority from scripture.

THUS I have pointed out all the proofs subjoined to the article now under review, and likewise all those adduced to support the same doctrine in the Catechism; and, it is now manifest, they all amount to nothing: most of them say nothing at all relating to this doctrine, and some of them seem rather to be against it. Wonderful indeed it is, that such a collection of texts should ever have passed with men for proofs of such a doctrine.

WE have now seen that the Westminster Divines have failed in their attempt to prove this doctrine from scripture. Let us next turn our attention to some of those places of the sacred writings which seem to teach a contrary doctrine.

ST PAUL, in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, saith, ‘ God will render to every
‘ man according to his deeds: to them who by
‘ patient continuance in well-doing, seek for
‘ glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal
‘ life. But unto them that are contentious, and
‘ do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteous-
‘ nefs, indignation, and wrath; tribulation and
‘ anguish upon every soul of man that doth e-
‘ vil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.
‘ But glory, honour, and peace, to every man
‘ that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to

‘ the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons
‘ with God; for as many as have sinned without
‘ law, shall also perish without law; and as many
‘ as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by
‘ the law,—in the day when God shall judge
‘ the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.’

ATTEND now to the solemn, important, and interesting scene which the Apostle here opens up to view. See Jews and Gentiles, all mankind, all nations, and all generations of men standing before the tribunal of God, who shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ: a vast assembly! awful expectation in their looks! how vast the multitude of those who never heard the gospel! Now their fate is finally to be determined. How is the judgment to proceed? by what rules is it to be conducted? this we are to learn of an Apostle, who was guided by that wisdom which cannot err. There is no respect of persons with God. Therefore even they who never heard the gospel, shall be treated by him in judgment with fairness, equity, and impartiality. Though God may bestow his free gifts and favours variously upon men in this world, yet in judgment he cannot wrong them, but will judge them fairly and equitably, according as they have improved, or neglected to improve, the talents wherewith they were intrusted, whether these have been many or few. But let us attend to the Apostle.

HE, in the first place, affirms expressly, that

God will render TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: EVERY man, Jew, Christian, or Heathen, shall be recompensed, not according as he hath been favoured with a greater or less degree of light, but according to the use he hath made of that light which God gave him, or according as his own works have been.

THIS general doctrine, the Apostle, in the next place, explains more particularly. To them, saith he, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be indignation and wrath: that is, good men, who continue patient in well-doing under trials and temptations, shall be rewarded with eternal life; and wicked men, who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be subjected to indignation and wrath: or, in other words, good men shall be rewarded according to their good deeds; and wicked men shall be punished according to their evil deeds; and in this manner it is, that God, in the day when he shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, will render to every man according to HIS DEEDS, whether they be good or evil.

AGAIN, the Apostle declares, that this shall be the UNIVERSAL RULE of the divine judgment, a RULE by which Jews and Gentiles, ALL NATIONS of the earth shall be judged.

‘Tribulation and anguish shall be upon every
‘soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and
‘also of the Gentile. But glory, honour, and
‘peace to every man that WORKETH GOOD, to
‘the Jew first, and also TO THE GENTILE:
‘for there is no respect of persons with God.’—

Here observe, Jews and Gentiles, that is, all mankind, shall be rewarded or punished according to their works. Tribulation and anguish shall be upon every Jew and every Gentile that doth evil; but glory, honour, and peace shall be to every Jew and every Gentile that worketh good. Jews and Gentiles evidently comprehend all mankind. And the Apostle here affirms, that every Jew and every Gentile, who is a doer of evil, shall be subjected to tribulation and anguish; but every Jew and every Gentile, who is a worker of that which is good, shall be put into possession of glory, honour, and peace. Thus, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, every man of every nation shall be rewarded or punished according to his works. It must be so, and cannot possibly be otherwise; FOR THERE IS NO RESPECT OF PERSONS WITH GOD.—He is a righteous Judge, and cannot but do that which is right.—Here it is manifestly the Apostle’s sentiment, that in the last day there may be some found, who have been workers of that which is good, among Gentiles, who have no other guide than the light of nature, as well as among Jews, who had the benefit of a divine revelation. Unless this was his belief, he could with no propriety say, ‘Glory,

‘honour, and peace, shall be to every man that
‘worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the
‘Gentile.’ These words, ‘And also to the Gen-
‘tile,’ would be altogether superfluous, and
could have no meaning at all, upon the supposition,
that it is not possible for a Gentile to be so
far a worker of that which is good, as to be graciously
accepted of God, and put into possession of glory,
honour, and peace, at the last day.--- It is in vain
to alledge, that the Apostle means a Gentile converted
to the Christian faith. This cannot be admitted; for
the Apostle himself tells us, that he means Jews under
the law of Moses, and Gentiles under the mere light
of nature, having no law but that which God hath
written in their hearts. Attend to his own words: ‘Tri-
‘bulation and anguish, shall be upon every
‘foul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first,
‘and also of the Gentile;---for as many as have
‘sinned *without law*, shall also perish without
‘law; and as many as have sinned in the law,
‘shall be judged by the law.’---But, on the other
hand, ‘Glory, honour, and peace, shall be
‘to every man that worketh good, to the Jew
‘first, and also to the Gentile;---for when the
‘Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature
‘the things contained in the law, these having
‘not the law, are a law unto themselves, which
‘shew the work of THE LAW WRITTEN IN
‘THEIR HEARTS, their conscience also bearing
‘witness, and their thoughts the mean while
‘accusing, or else excusing one another.’

OBSERVE attentively these words, ‘Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil,---also of the Gentile;---for as many as have sinned *without law*, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in, or under the law, shall be judged by the law,---in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.’ Here the words, *without law*, as they stand connected, must signify without a revealed law, such as the Jews then had, and the Christians now have; for no man can sin without the law of nature, under which all men are born, and which is written in every man’s heart. The Gentiles therefore, of whom the Apostle here speaks, are such Gentiles as have no revealed law, neither the law of Moses, nor the law of Christ; they have no law, but the law of nature, which God hath written in their hearts; and as many of them as have sinned without a revealed law, shall, in the day of judgment, also perish without a revealed law: they shall be judged, not by a revealed law which they never had, but by the law of nature, and shall be justly condemned, and subjected to tribulation and anguish, for their transgressions of the law written in their hearts. This is evidently the Apostle’s meaning. Consider his words, as they stand connected, with care and attention, and try if you can, without violence, fix any other meaning upon them. And if this be the meaning of the words, *without law*, as they here stand in connexion, then here is a clear proof, that the Apostle is not speaking of Gentiles converted to

the Christian faith, but of such Gentiles as have no other guide, and no other rule of life, besides the light and law of nature. And, to confirm this, observe, that he speaks of such Gentiles, in opposition to the Jews, who, besides the light of nature, were also favoured with a divine revelation. 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul
' of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also
' of the Gentile; for as many as have sinned without a revealed law, which is the case of evil
' doers among the Gentiles, shall also be condemned in judgment, and perish without any
' regard to a revealed law, which can be no rule
' of judgment to those who never had such a
' law: and as many as have sinned in, or under
' the law of Moses, which is the case of evil doers
' among the Jews, shall be judged by that law.'

Again, turn your attention to these words, 'Glory, honour, and peace, to every man that
' worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the
' Gentile;---for when the Gentiles, which have
' not the law, do by nature the things contained
' ed in the law, these having not the law, are a
' law unto themselves, which shew the work of
' the law written in their hearts.' It is manifest the Apostle here speaks of Gentiles who have not a revealed law; Gentiles, who DO BY NATURE the things contained in the revealed law, so far as relates to the moral duties therein required; Gentiles, who, not having any revealed law, are a law unto themselves, and who shew the work of the law WRITTEN IN THEIR HEARTS. These certainly are not Gentiles con-

verted to the Christian faith, but Gentiles who have no other guide than the light of nature, and no other divine law, but that which God hath, with his own finger, written in their hearts; and of such Gentiles the Apostle expressly affirms, that, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, glory, honour, and peace, shall be to every man among them that worketh good. This is a demonstration, that St Paul's sentiments were different from those of the Westminster Divines. His opinion evidently was, that the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, ARE SUFFICIENT to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation, and DO IN FACT give that knowledge to those who duly attend to that light, and sincerely obey the precepts of that divine law which is inscribed on the consciences of all men. And, indeed, through the whole of this second chapter to the Romans, the Apostle evidently supposes, that true religion is of an universal nature and extent, and may possibly be found among all nations. Wherever men are with a divine law inscribed on their consciences, there true religion may in fact be. This is manifestly the Apostle's sense, when he saith, verse 27th, 'And shall not the uncircumcision, which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?' That is, shall not the heathen, who is by nature, or hath no other guide but the light of nature, shall not such a one, if he fulfil the law written

in his heart, judge and condemn thee, who enjoyest the privileges of revelation, and yet transgrestest the divine law? The Apostle's argument has no force, if it be not true, that an heathen, having no other guide but the light of nature, may so far fulfil the law that he is under, as to be graciously accepted of God at the last day. This is the foundation of the Apostle's reasoning with the Jew, and will equally hold with regard to the Christian too. We may truly turn his words unto ourselves, and say, Shall not the heathen, who is by nature, if he fulfil, or sincerely obey the law of God written in his heart, condemn thee, O Christian! who, besides the law written in thy heart, enjoyest also the benefit of revelation, and yet dost habitually transgress the divine law, not only inscribed on thy own conscience, but also clearly revealed and enforced by the authority of Jesus Christ? Shall not such a pious and virtuous heathen be accepted in the day of judgment, when thou, a wicked Christian, shalt be condemned?

THIS is St Paul's doctrine: but it is not his alone: St Peter also, in a few words, but with great plainness, teacheth the same doctrine, Acts x. 34. 'Of a truth, saith he, I perceive that God 'is no respecter of persons; but in every nation 'he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, 'is accepted of him.' Here it is evidently supposed, that there may be men in every nation, who fear God, and work righteousness. And here it is expressly affirmed, that all such men,

wherever they are found, are accepted of God.— Thus St Peter and St Paul agree in teaching, that all men, in all nations, who fear God, and work righteousness, are accepted of him. And not only they, but also our Lord Jesus Christ himself gives it against the Westminster Divines: in the eighth chapter of the gospel according to St Matthew, we read as follows:

‘ AND when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented; and Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him: the centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed; for I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say unto this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, as thou hast be-

‘lieved, so be it done unto thee; and his servant
‘was healed in the self-same hour.’

Now this centurion, whose faith our Lord so highly commends, was a heathen, a captain of an hundred Roman soldiers: and concerning this man’s faith, our Saviour saith, Verily I have not found so great faith as this heathen hath professed, no, not in Israel, who are the peculiar people of God, and the children of his kingdom. And I say unto you, that many heathens, who are not the children of the kingdom in this world, shall, in the last day, come from the east and west, from all parts of the globe, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, the children of the kingdom are the members of the visible church in this world, both under the Jewish and Christian dispensation; for our Lord is here speaking of the final issue of things at the last day, when all the various dispensations of the kingdom of God in this world shall be finished; and therefore what he here saith, doth most naturally refer to the kingdom of God under any dispensation: and that our Lord here speaks of the final issue of things at the last day, is manifest from his own words: for outer darkness, and weeping, and gnashing of teeth, are in all other places used by our Lord, to express the final punishment of the wicked in the world to come.

BESIDES, if the many who shall come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, be understood of those heathens who should hereafter embrace the Christian faith, and be taken into the peculiar kingdom of God in this world, then our Saviour's assertion surely is not to the point, with regard to the centurion's case, who was an heathen: for then his assertion would run thus, I say unto you, that many, who shall hereafter be the children of the kingdom, shall come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, while the present children of the kingdom, that is, the present Jews, shall be cast out. Thus the opposition would be between the present and future children of the kingdom, or between Jews and Christians: whereas the centurion's case, of which our Saviour here speaks, evidently required, that the opposition should be between heathens and the children of the kingdom. If therefore it be granted, that our blessed Lord spoke to the purpose, and did not speak nonsense, this text will be a clear and full proof, that many heathens shall in the last day be saved, and admitted into the future everlasting kingdom of God, while some, who are the children of the kingdom in this world, whether Jews or Christians, shall be cast out into outer darkness.

OUR Lord found in a heathen such faith as he found not in Israel. And that a heathen may

possibly so believe, as to come unto God, is evident from what an inspired Apostle hath said, Heb. xi. 6. 'He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him:' The objects of saving faith must be more or less extensive, according as men enjoy a greater or less degree of light. To whom much is given, of them much shall be required. The objects of faith before our Lord's coming could not be so extensive as ours now are, when we have the whole scheme of divine revelation before our eyes. A Jew therefore might be a true believer, and yet be ignorant of many things which a Christian may easily know. May not a heathen then be a true believer, though he knows not; and therefore cannot believe all those things which are revealed to us in the gospel? A heathen in any part of the world, who has no other guide than the light of nature, and in that light sees that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and accordingly cometh to God by an obedient life, so far as he knows his duty, is evidently a true believer, according to the Apostle's general account of faith. Consequently a heathen under the mere light of nature may possibly exercise true faith, and be an accepted believer in the sight of God; for he may believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. And our Lord, who knew what was in man, hath expressly declared, that in the last day many such heathens shall come from the east and west, and sit down

with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

SEVERAL other texts to the same purpose might easily be produced. But it is needless to multiply words concerning a point which is already abundantly evident. St Peter, St Paul, and our Lord Jesus Christ, are clearly against the Westminster Divines. We may therefore cease to wonder, that they have failed in their attempt to prove this doctrine of theirs from scripture; and may safely conclude, that the doctrine itself is not true.

BUT of what use is this discovery? Let him who puts this question, consider how vast a number of Christians make this Confession the rule of their faith; and while they imagine themselves to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they do, in fact, believe *only* in the Westminster assembly. Many of the dissenting clergy in England and Ireland subscribe this Confession, as the Confession of their Faith, and warmly recommend it to their hearers, as a standard of faith and orthodoxy. All the clergy in Scotland subscribe this same Confession, and solemnly declare, that they believe the whole doctrine therein contained to be the truths of God. This proposition, "The light of nature, and the
" works of creation and providence, are not
" sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and
" of his will, which is necessary unto salva-
" tion," is a part of that whole doctrine. This

proposition we have now found to be false, and contrary to the truths of God declared by our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Possibly there may be several other propositions of the same kind in that Confession. Is it not a pity that so many of our fellow Christians and fellow citizens should be left to believe implicitly in the Westminster Assembly, and nobody endeavour to show them their error? Would it not be useful to examine every doubtful or suspicious article in that Confession, and to publish the examination of them to the world? Is it not possible that this might convince some of that numerous body of subscribing clergy, that it is rash in them to affirm the whole doctrine of this Confession to be the truths of God? As to the clergy in Scotland, who all subscribe, some of them would possibly be glad to see this done; but not one of them dares to undertake it; for if any of them should, he would be immediately libelled for heresy, and his orthodox brethren would proceed, in charity and brotherly love, to depose him, with all convenient speed, according to the rules of their church. And if there be any among the clergy who would wish to see religious truth prevail, would it not be a kind office to examine those articles for them, which they themselves dare not examine?

BUT there is in Scotland, besides the clergy, a much more numerous body of men, called ruling elders, who all subscribe the Westminster Confession; many of these are noblemen, gentle-

men, men of fortunes, and men of learning; and many of them, it is to be hoped, are sincere lovers of truth: to them an examination of those articles, which they subscribe, may be useful, though it should be of no use to the clergy; and, especially, it may be useful to the people, who are the most numerous body, and the most of all to be pitied.

I SHALL now conclude with a few excerpts from a pamphlet, published at Belfast in the year 1766, entituled, *A Letter to the Protestant Dissenters in the parish of Ballikelly*. The author of that Letter, after saying some smart things concerning the article which I have now examined, adds what follows:

‘ THERE are other things in this Confession
‘ still more hard to be understood, and in which
‘ it is of much greater importance for us to be
‘ rightly informed. Thus, Chap. IX. Sect. 3.
‘ we are told, that a natural man is not able to
‘ convert himself, nor to prepare himself there-
‘ unto. And, Chap. XVI. Sect. 7. that works
‘ done by unregenerate men, though----they
‘ may be things which God commands,----yet
‘ they are sinful, and cannot please God, or make
‘ a man meet to receive grace from God; and
‘ yet the neglect of them is more sinful and
‘ displeasing to God.

‘ EVERY one at all acquainted with these au-
‘ thors, knows, that by a natural and unregene-

‘rate man, they mean one and the same character. How wretched then is this unregenerate man! and why should he pray to God for deliverance from this state, since he cannot thereby convert himself, nor prepare himself thereunto? nay, since this will be so far from making him meet to receive favour from God, that it will be a sin according to this scheme. Must not the person, who really believes this, be disposed, in the bitterness of his soul, to curse the author of his existence, who has brought him into being in such deplorable circumstances, that he cannot please God, but must sin, even by doing those things which God hath commanded? How happy for us, that such distracting notions are seldom attended to by any body! Whence ariseth the necessity or expediency of calling upon any Christian to profess that he believes these doctrines? Have they any other tendency than to put people mad, or to make them desperate and quite unconcerned about their conduct? Are they not contrary to the command of Jesus, enforced by his promise, *Ask, and ye shall receive?* and to his express declaration, *That God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

‘It were easy to show, that the texts of scripture brought to prove such opinions, are egregiously misapplied: but a particular explication of these would be inconsistent with the brevity here intended. Let the mention of a

‘text, which these gentlemen advance for another opinion in their writings, serve as a specimen of their manner of quoting the scriptures. This will show the force of religious prejudice, even in such great divines, in an age when the Bible had not been studied with sufficient exactness after a reformation from some of the corruptions of Popery. Nor is this bearing too hard upon them: for, according to themselves, Chap. I. Sect. 9. ‘The only infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is scripture itself, by which all doctrines of men are to be tried, and in whose sentence we are to rest.’

‘IN this spirit let us try one of their doctrines in the Shorter Catechism, ‘That all mankind, by the fall, to wit of Adam and Eve,---became liable to the pains of hell for ever.’ To support this, among other scriptures, which any person may see to be equally impertinent, they produce Matth. xxv. 41. Then shall he say also to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; with verse 46. These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

‘Now, whoever will be at the pains of turning to this place in his Bible, may perceive, without any labour, or critical skill, that our Lord is not speaking one word here of what men may suffer for Adam’s offence, but expressly

‘informing his disciples, what the wicked shall,
‘in fact, undergo for their own sins: for he
‘says, in the person of his followers, I was
‘hungry, and ye gave me no meat, &c. Here
‘we are taught by the faithful and true Witness,
‘that the dreadful sentence passed against the
‘curled, will be wholly owing to their own want
‘of good affections, and not to a sin committed
‘by another person thousands of years before
‘they were made. About the meaning of
‘this text, then, Jesus of Nazareth, and the
‘Westminster Divines, entertained different
‘opinions: and which of them you will believe,
‘judge ye. This is but one of the many texts
‘referred to in this Confession, which have
‘no sort of relation to what they are quoted
‘for. Would people, that don’t desire to be
‘deceived, examine it fairly, they would see,
‘that the authors of it were indeed fallible; an
‘entire persuasion of which would be of no
‘small advantage to many Christians: but this
‘would require a temper truly teachable, and
‘some degree of application. Supposing then,
‘a thing not impossible in itself, that an upright
‘Christian, desirous to know the will of God,
‘and to do it, should, after due inquiry, deny
‘his assent to some opinions in this Confession,
‘or see that the scriptures of truth are injuri-
‘ously treated, in being drawn in to prove very
‘absurd tenets, by what rule of Christianity shall
‘he be excluded from the enjoyment of Christian
‘privileges? The church of Rome professedly
‘takes the Bible from the people: and

‘ to what purpose does the church of Scotland *
‘ leave it in their hands, if they must neither
‘ study it without fetters upon their minds, nor
‘ understand it in a sense different from the
‘ clergy, under the high penalty of being shut
‘ out from Christian communion, and deliver-
‘ ed over to Satan? In this matter, there seems
‘ to be just as much difference between the con-
‘ duct of the spiritual fathers in these two
‘ churches, as there would be found between
‘ two natural parents, the one of whom would
‘ keep wholesome nourishing food from his
‘ children entirely, while the other would put it
‘ into their hands, but correct them severely for
‘ making use of it.

‘ MANY in almost every Christian society are
‘ so constantly employed in providing daily bread
‘ for their families, that they have little enough
‘ time left to spend upon a more useful book,
‘ that is, the Bible; where they may find true
‘ religion quite free from those corrupt glosses
‘ and false interpretations, that poison the mind,
‘ and blind the understanding to such a degree,
‘ that it cannot discern the plainest truths.—Here
‘ it will be objected, that, upon these principles,
‘ we may receive Papists into our communion;
‘ for they will readily acknowledge that they
‘ believe the Bible. But this objection is found-

* The Author might have added the church of England;
for, I am sorry to say it, the Thirty nine Articles are not much
better than the Westminster Confession.

‘ ed upon very confused apprehensions of the
‘ matter of fact; for, though every Papist of
‘ common sense will indeed own, that he be-
‘ lieves the Bible, yet no Papist, who knows his
‘ principles, and acts up to them, will at all
‘ grant, that he believes the Bible alone to be
‘ the rule of his faith or religious obedience.
‘ No, all real Papists of every denomination
‘ take only a part of their religion from the
‘ Bible; and, along with this, join the doctrines
‘ and decisions of their respective synods and as-
‘ semblies. Whenever any man renounces these,
‘ and adheres to the Bible alone, from that mo-
‘ ment he renounces Popery: and why should he
‘ not be received with open arms? Shall it be
‘ said, that people take the Bible in different
‘ senses? What does this prove, but that they
‘ should enjoy their several opinions in peace?
‘ Are the members of any church agreed about
‘ the meaning of their favourite system of ar-
‘ ticles? far from it; uniformity of sentiment is
‘ quite unattainable; the utmost we should aim
‘ at is unity of affection.----That unity among
‘ the disciples of Jesus is both practicable, and
‘ extremely desirable, is evident from the solemn
‘ pathetic prayer of Christ to this purpose, in the
‘ xvii. chap. of John. But do not human schemes
‘ of faith, set up as rules, standards, or tests, in
‘ the nature of the thing, keep the different par-
‘ ties of Christians at an irreconcilable distance
‘ from each other?----Without these engines of
‘ discord, as there is but one Shepherd, so there
‘ might be but one sheepfold. Notwithstanding

‘ our different opinions in other things, we
‘ might all join in the most solemn offices of re-
‘ ligion, under the common name of Christians,
‘ having one God and Father of all; one Lord
‘ Jesus Christ; one faith in him; one baptism,
‘ in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and
‘ of the Holy Ghost; with one hope or end of
‘ our calling, even the salvation of our souls: the
‘ only list of fundamentals which the Apostle
‘ Paul has given us, when expressly speaking
‘ upon this subject, whatever additions wiser
‘ people have made since his time. See Eph.
‘ iv. 1,---6.’

T H E E N D.

...of the Father, and of the Son, and
of the Holy Ghost; with one hope or end of
our calling, even the salvation of our souls: the
only life of thanksgiving which the Apostle
Paul has given us, when expressly speaking
upon this subject, whatever additions will
people have made **66** It is time, for the
iv. 1. 1. 1. 1.

T H E E N D

